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ABSTRACT

In the 1980s West Virginia lost 70,000 mining and manufacturing jobs and nearly 4% of its population. Yet, despite the economic decline and a poverty rate of 23%, most West Virginians choose to stay. This series of newspaper articles focuses on why they stay. The story of one laid-off coal miner and his family illustrates the plight of many. Since their unemployment benefits ran out in 1983, this family has struggled along on welfare payments, food stamps, and odd jobs. Job retraining programs promise only minimum wage jobs, and rural residents such as these can not afford to commute to such jobs. Family members' religious faith has sustained them, and close attachments to family and community tie them to home. Other articles outline statistics on population change, outmigration, unemployment, job market changes, and loss of federal aid; and discuss the collapse of coal industry employment, quality of life factors in the decision to remain, educational needs, job retraining, women in the work force, religious influences, financial aid for college tuition, the barter economy, and songs about attachment to home among West Virginians and other Appalachian people. Editorials discuss state trends in economic development and the threats of out-of-state garbage and rapacious strip mining. Dozens of letters to the editor tell why readers love their state: natural beauty, small communities, extended families, low crime rate, and relaxed lifestyle. (SV)

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